

Message Text

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SUBJECT: MOSCOW AVANT GARDE ARTISTS ATTRACT INCREASING
PUBLIC AND OFFICIAL ATTENTION

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BEGIN SUMMARY: THE EXHIBIT OF THE MOSCOW CITY JOINT
COMMITTEE OF GRAPHIC ARTISTS PROCEEDS WITH WALL-TO-WALL
CROWDS THROINGING THE REOPENED GALLERY, NOW PROVIDED WITH
A NEW EXIT DOOR AND A STAIRWAY LINKING THE GALLERY'S
TWO FLOORS (REF A). OFFICIAL REACTION TO WESTERN-PRESS
PLAY ON THE EXHIBIT'S POSTPONEMENT CAUSES UNEASE AMONG
SOME OF THE GROUP ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION'S FUTURE, ABOUT
THEIR "FREEDOM" WITHIN IT. A "PURGE" OF THE MEMBERSHIP IS
EXPECTED SOON AFTER THE EXHIBIT'S CLOSE ON MARCH 19.
IN A FREE-WHEELING DISCUSSION WITH EMBASSY OFFICERS, THE
CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE, VLADIMIR MIKHAYLOVICH
ASHCHEULOV, EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE IN THE GROUP'S FUTURE,
NO OBVIOUS CONCERN ABOUT HIS OWN, AND HE CRITICIZED THE
WESTERN PRESS FOR ASCRIBING THE POSTPONED OPENING TO
DIFFICULTIES BETWEEN THE ARTISTS AND MEMBERS OF THE
MANAGEMENT OF THE ARTIST'S GROUP, WITH THE MOSCOW CITY
AUTHORITIES ALLEGEDLY PLAYING THE SINISTER ROLE OF
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VISITING CENSOR JUST PRIOR TO THE SCHEDULED OPENING.
SHOWING A PHOTO BLOWUP OF HIMSELF WIELDING A PNEUMATIC DRILL
AS THE GALLERY WALL WAS BROKEN OPEN TO ACCOMMODATE THE
OUTSIDE DOOR, ASHCHEULOV DESCRIBES IT TO VISITORS AS "OUR
OPEN WINDOW TO EUROPE." HE HAS SUGGESTED TO THE MFA PRESS
DIVISION THAT HE HOLD A POST-EXHIBIT PRESS CONFERENCE
WITH WESTERN JOURNALISTS TO EXPLAIN HIS SELECTION

PROCEDURES AND TO DISCUSS THE PAINTINGS HE REJECTED. END SUMMARY.

1. ACCORDING TO THE MORE CONCERNED OF THE ARTISTS, A "CHISTKA" (PURGE) IS IN THE OFFING AS SOON AS THE EXHIBIT CLOSES. ASHCHEULOV IS UNDER PRESSURE "FROM ABOVE" TO PUNISH THOSE "GUILTY" OF PUBLICIZING THE EXHIBIT'S DELAY AND ATTRIBUTING IT TO CENSORSHIP PROBLEMS. A GENERAL REVIEW OF EACH ARTIST'S "RELATIONSHIP TO SOCIETY" IS IN THE OFFING, THE COUNSELOR FOR PRESS AND CULTURE WAS TOLD, MEANING THAT THE ARTIST'S "OTHER WORK" OR PLACE OF WORK WILL BE CONSIDERED CLOSELY. SINCE INCLUSION IN THE COMMITTEE OF GRAPHIC ARTISTS CONFERS ON ITS MEMBERS AN IDENTITY CARD WHICH PRECLUDES THEIR BEING ACCUSED OF PARASITISM, MANY MEMBERS WHO HAVE NO FIXED JOB, AND WHOSE NON-CONFORMISM IS RECORDED IN SOME CASES BACK TO THE 1974 IZMAILOVSKIY OUTDOOR ART EXHIBIT BROKEN UP BY BULL-DOZERS AND POLICE, FEAR HAVING THEIR COMMITTEE CARDS REMOVED AND THEREAFTER BEING HOUNDED BY THE POLICE. (MEMBERSHIP IN ASHCHEULOV'S GROUP IS EXPECTED TO BIND ITS ARTISTS TO AT LEAST TWO RULES OF BEHAVIOR; (A) NON-PARTICIPATION IN THE APARTMENT EXHIBITS WHICH HAD CHARACTERIZED MOSCOW'S UNOFFICIAL ART WORLD ESPECIALLY IN 1974-76 AND, (B) DISCUSSIONS WITHIN THE GROUP WOULD NOT BE LEAKED TO THE WESTERN PRESS. THE FIRST PRECEPT SEEMS NOT TO HAVE BEEN VIOLATED; THE SECOND CERTAINLY HAS.) LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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2. EXPANSIVE IN HIS OFFICE DOWN THE HALL FROM THE GALLERY OVER A LATE SATURDAY MORNING SNACK OF CHILLED VODKA, SALTED FATBACK, DILL PICKLES AND BLACK BREAD, ASHCHEULOV GREETED THE EMBASSY'S COUNSELOR FOR PRESS AND CULTURE AND HIS WIFE AND THE PRESS ATTACHE WITH A DISCUSSION OF THE EXHIBIT'S POSTPONEMENT AND THE GRAPHICS COMMITTEE'S FUTURE. DECISIONS ON WHICH WORKS WOULD BE EXHIBITED WERE MADE RIGHT IN HIS OFFICE, ASHCHEULOV INSISTED, WITH ONLY THE ARTISTS AND HIMSELF INVOLVED. INDEED, SOME WERE NOT DISPLAYED END FOR VARIOUS REASONS. FOR ONE, THE WALLS ARE CROWDED ENOUGH, WITH OVER 80 CANVASES. FOR ANOTHER, THE GROUP HAD DECIDED THAT NO WORK WOULD BE SHOWN MORE THAN ONCE, BUT SOME ARTISTS KEPT INSISTING. ONLY A FEW WORKS WERE REJECTED AS "UNSUITABLE"--AND ASHCHEULOV PROUDLY DISPLAYED A SPLENDID PENCIL DRAWING BY S. A. SHAROV WHICH HE REJECTED BECAUSE OF ITS EXTRAORDINARILY DETAILED DEPICTION OF SEX IN VARIOUS MANIFESTATIONS, BOTH EXPLICITLY AND ALLEGORICALLY PRESENTED. BEAUTIFULLY FRAMED IN STAINED WOOD, THIS DRAWING SEEMS TO HAVE ITS AT LEAST TEMPORARY PLACE IN ASHCHEULOV'S OFFICE.

3. AS FOR LITNITSKIY, ASHCHEULOV CONTINUED, WHY SHOULD HE COMPLAIN TO THE PRESS? HE HAD AN ENTIRE ROOM TO HIMSELF, TO DISPLAY HIS 12 LARGE CANVASES ON THE APOCALYPSE. THE ARTIST WANDERS THE ROOM EXPLAINING HIS CANVASES TO THE VISITORS AND TENDS A RECORDER PLAYING TAPES OF OROTHODOX CHURCH MUSIC (IN SOVIET RECORDINGS). (LITNITSKIY, IT SHOULD BE NOTED, WAS IN FACT DENIED THE RIGHT TO HANG THE CAPTIONS HE HAD PREPARED GIVING HIS PICTURES' TITLES, BUT HE KEEPS THESE ON HIM AND WILL SHOW THEM TO AN INQUIRER; WHEN AN OFFICIAL PERSON APPEARS IN SIGHT HE POPS THEM

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BACK INTO HIS POCKET.)

4. NO WESTERN GALLERY OR MUSEUM ACCEPTS ALL OF THE PICTURES PRESENTED TO IT FOR DISPLAY, ASHCHEULOV INSISTS, AND HE INTENDS TO MAKE THIS POINT SHOULD THE PRESS CONFERENCE HE HAS ASKED THE MFA PRESS DIVISION TO ORGANIZE EVER TAKE PLACE. FURTHER, HE WILL EXPLAIN THAT THE EXHIBIT'S POSTPONEMENT WAS DUE TO (A) A MOSCOW FIRE DEPARTMENT ORDER THAT AN EXTRA EXIT AND A STAIRWAY CONNECTING THE TWO EXHIBIT GALLERY FLOORS HAD TO BE BUILT AND (B) THE UNFRIENDLY ATTITUDE OF THE SECRETARY OF THE MOSCOW UNION OF CULTURAL WORKERS WHO BOTH WORKS AND LIVES IN THE BUILDING AND HAS COMPLAINED THAT HER OFFICE AND HER APARTMENT LIVING ARE NOW PERMANENTLY CHANGED BY THE CONSTANT NOISE OF VISITORS TO THE EXHIBITS. THE NEW STAIRWAY WILL ENABLE VISITORS TO VISIT BOTH FLOORD WITHOUT USING THE HALLWAY NEAR HER OFFICE, ASHCHEULOV SAID. SINCE THIS GOOD LADY, ONE SATURDAY WHILE THE ANSEL ADAMS SHOW WAS IN MOSCOW, LOCKED THE EXHIBIT DOORS DESPITE A LINE OF

OUT OF TOWN INTOURIST BUSES LINING THE CURB, HER IRE AND POWER HAD TO BE RESPECTED. IN ANY EVENT, QUESTIONS REMAIN, AND HIS EMBASSY VISITORS ENCOURAGED ASHCHEULOV TO FOLLOW THROUGH ON HIS SUGGESTED PRESS CONFERENCE AS A NECESSARY "FIRST" IN RELATIONS BETWEEN A SOVIET CULTURAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OFFICIAL AND THE WESTERN PRESS.

5. AS FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE, ASHCHEULOV CONTINUES TO PLAN HIS GALLERY'S SHOWS. AFTER A ONE-MAN SHOW BY EDUARD DROBITSKIY (MARCH 20-APRIL3), THERE WILL BE A SEVEN-MAN SHOW TO INCLUDE KANDAUROV, NEMUKHIN, KALININ, KHARITONOV AND ZVEREV BEGINNING APRIL 7. ASKED BY THE P&C COUNSELOR WHEN ZVEREV HAD JOINED HIS GROUP, ASHCHEULOV SAID THAT THIS OCCURRED AS SOON AS HE WAS "OUT OF THE INFLUENCE OF GEORGE KOSTAKIS" (RECENTLY DEPARTED FROM THE SOVIET UNION, WHO HAD VIRTUALLY SUPPORTED ZVEREV OVER A PERIOD OF ALMOST TWO DECADES BY BUYING HIS WORKS EN GROS).

6. THE WALL OF THE HALL NEAR THE ARTISTS CLUB BEARS A HANDLETTERED ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE ARTISTS ANNOUNCING A FUTURE EXHIBIT ON THE THEME OF THE 1905 UPRISING IN THE KRASNAYA PRESNYA AREA OF MOSCOW (IN WHICH THE GALLERY IS LOCATED). ON AN EARLIER OCCASION ASHCHEULOV HAD ASSURED THE P&C COUNSELOR THAT HE WOULD SUCCEED IN GETTING HIS GROUP TO DEDICATE ITSELF TO THIS THEME BECAUSE HE WOULD NOT IMPOSE ANY PARTICULAR STYLE NOR INSIST THAT ANY PARTICULAR FIGURE OR EVENT ASSOCIATED WITH THE UPRISING BE DEPICTED. IN THE CONTEXT OF THAT DISCUSSION IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT HIS SUCCESS IN BRINGING HIS GROUP OF UNORTHODOX ARTISTS TOGETHER TO COMMEMORATE AN EVENT CRUCIAL IN COMMUNIST HISTORY AND HAGIOGRAPHY WOULD BE AN ACID TEST OF THE GRUOP'S VALIDITY, BY PARTY STANDARDS.

7. MEANWHILE, THOSE FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO BE SHOWING IN THE NEW GALLERY ARE ATTRACTING THE KEEN ATTENTION OF THE BUYING FOREIGN COMMUNITY OF DIPLOMATS AND NEWSMEN. ASHCHEULOV HAS ENCOURAGED HIS "KOLLEKTIV" TO ARRIVFEON LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE SCENE BEFORE THE EXHIBIT'S OPENING HOUR, TO GREET FRIENDS AND POTENTIAL CUSTOMERS IN GREATER PRIVACY THAN IS AFFORDED DURING THE DAY AS THE THOUSANDS THRONG THE EXHIBIT. PRICES ARE UP. SAZONOV, ONE OF THE SEASON'S

DISCOVERIES, HAS SOLD EVERY PICTURE ON DISPLAY, A TOTAL OF ABOUT TEN, AT AN AVERAGE PRICE OF 400 RUBLES. SMIRNOV, PAINTING MASTERFULLY IN A TRADITIONAL TROMPE L'OEIL STYLE AND ATTRACTING SOME KEEN BIDDING, ASKS FROM 600 TO 800 RUBLES FOR AN AVERAGE SIZE CANVAS. ASHCHEULOV, WHO SAYS HE IS OFF TO JAPAN IN MAY WITH SEVERAL OF HIS ARTISTS FOR A PUBLISHING HOUSE CONFERENCE , EXPANSIVELY TAKES HIS DIPLOMATIC VISITORS AROUND, ENCOURAGING THEM TO LOOK FAVORABLY ON THIS ONE, OR THAT--AND HE OFFERS THE ARTIST'S ADDRESS, THOUGH HE KNOWS NO PRICES. THIS PHENOMENON OF THE LOCAL SCENE MAY BE UNDERGOING A TIME OF TROUBLES; IT MAY NOT LIVE FOREVER; BUT IT IS CERTAINLY ENLIVENING THE MOSCOW CULTURAL SCENE AT THE MOMENT AND, PROBABLY, WORRYING NOT A FEW OF THE MORE ORTHODOX OF THE KEEPERS OF THE FAITH. TOON

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